

Social Media Guidelines & Policies

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Social Media Guidelines & Policies

Executive Summary

Social media is rapidly changing the workplace even while its technology and protocols are still being developed. The boundaries between our private lives and work lives are starting to blur as people are living their lives online and in public. Social media is also showing signs of driving business for those who know how to use it.

There's no denying the numbers for some of the media: Facebook users now have an estimated 300 million accounts. It's an online vehicle for friends to stay in touch with each other by joining or "friending" another's Facebook page. New employees are using its pages to become acquainted with their co-workers before they start their new positions.

One of the more significant workplace and social changes is the definition of a "friend," which is different from previous generations. We meet someone online and become closer by sharing information, but we may not meet this new friend face-to-face.

But employees and executives are also growing confused about what is appropriate behavior in this new, evolving world. Some sort of written guidelines or policies are advisable to provide answers to recurring questions. One set of social media protocols won't fit all organizations. The culture of an organization along with the allocation of time, expertise and funding that are devoted to a social media presence should be the determining factors in the development of policies or guiding principles.

Access to social media is being debated throughout the industry with disagreements on all sides of the issue. Gen X and Gen Y are actively participating on social networking sites. For them, messaging is replacing emails as a primary means of keeping in touch with friends, colleagues and family.

Social media is a force for democratizing information as users, not producers, control the content and the social interaction. Many workplace conversations are taking place on Facebook, while some provide an open door to worker's lives outside of their jobs.

One of the hidden benefits of a vibrant social media is that has the ability to uncover in-house expertise and valuable information. It can reveal the multiple talents of employees who might otherwise be pigeon-holed into a specific role throughout their career when they are in fact multi-talented. When employees communicate with one another on wikis, in-house blogs, Facebook, and Twitter they begin to build a community of fellow workers with a common bond. They learn about projects, skills and valuable information that can help them with their jobs; and can lead to employees who are more engaged at work.

Introduction

Social media is slowly altering the workplace in ways that are being viewed as both beneficial and detrimental within the financial services industry. Most social media is relatively new while the technology and protocols are still being developed. The boundaries between our private lives and our work lives—once clearly defined—are starting to blur as social media allows us to live “out loud” in public forums. Another factor to throw into the mix: social media is starting to drive more business.

A bank customer, for example, publically tweeted that he hated his bank in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Matt Davis, director of public relations for Members Credit Union, \$302 million assets, in the same city, tweeted back, “Is there anything I can do for you?”

What is also becoming evident is that employees and executives are confused about what is appropriate behavior in this new, evolving world of Facebook, Twitter, blogs and YouTube.

“Social Media Guidelines and Policies” is a white paper sponsored by CUNA’s Marketing and Business Development Council that offers a series of options for your credit union to consider in developing guidelines and policies for your employees. The culture of your organization along with how you plan to allocate time, expertise, and funding for your social media presence should be the determining factors in the development of your policies or guiding principles.

What is Social Media?

Social media are those media in which users can easily participate and contribute through social interaction using Internet and Web-based technologies. Users—not producers—are controlling the content, bringing democracy to social interaction and communications in a way experienced for the first time for many employees.

A *social network* is a virtual community that allows a user to connect with others and is typically developed around a certain demographic group that can be found, for example, in LinkedIn or Facebook. Credit unions, a century ago, started as social networks—communities of like-minded folks who wanted a safe place to save and competitive rates on loans.

Facebook: An online way for friends and acquaintances to stay in touch with each other, by joining or “friending” another’s Facebook’s page. Users put photos and updates on their pages to communicate with their “friends.” A number of credit unions and other organizations are creating pages on Facebook. While there is no cost to join, daily maintenance can be time consuming. Individuals and organizations can develop an online community but it needs to be authentic and transparent, otherwise people quickly see

through hustlers and hard-sell tactics. Users become “fans” of the business community in which the business is trying to build.

MySpace: is similar to Facebook but declining in popularity especially in some regions of the United States, mostly outside major media centers. A study of 100,000 MySpace users indicates they are located in places like Alabama, Arkansas, West Virginia, Kentucky and Florida; MySpace has 70 million users monthly, Twitter has 20 million, according to Harvard Business School Professor Mikolaj Jan Piskorski.ⁱ

MySpace is popular with bands trying to build a fan base. Users have the ability to play music on their page and can choose their background color, which is an advantage for musical promotions as the following shows:

[Young & Free South Carolina Last Band Standing](#), South Carolina Federal Credit Union’s contest attracted 24 bands, all of which had MySpace pages with thousands of friends. “The bands aggressively promoted their entries within MySpace and we saw huge traffic numbers coming from MySpace,” said Tim McAlpine, creator of Young & Free, and CEO of Currency Marketing.

Blogs: are written on most subjects imaginable; there are an estimated 70 million in existence. They are more communications vehicle than marketing device. Blogs are a good fit for credit unions; they can help inform members about the organization’s mission and what they are doing for the community.

Twitter: is a social networking tool that allows users to sign up free and send “tweets” which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters. The user types in the message on the Web or as text message on a mobile phone. The message is then sent to all of the person’s followers, who sign up to receive tweets from selected twitterers. Originally viewed as superficial, Twitter gained respect when it was one of the few media that transmitted information out of Iran during the disputed June 2009 presidential election.

LinkedIn: is an online network for professionals that is similar to Facebook—it’s free and users develop a profile and ask to become part of each other’s group. Professionals contact members of their group for job openings, consulting jobs, and other business interests.

YouTube: operates similar to Facebook with personalized profiles and messages, but uses videos as its main channel of communication. YouTube also tracks the number of showings of each video, which unlike other social media, is a means of tracking effectiveness. Many folks use YouTube to watch music videos. They also share bizarre, funny and occasionally off-color videos; there is running conversation of reactions to videos as viewers post comments. There is also a sidebar on the left that offers related videos as well as an option to replay.

Forums: Jeffry Pilcher, editor of the Financial Brand: <http://www.thefinancialbrand.com> says forums have unique powers in social media:

“They pre-date the Internet and anyone can start a topic, post a comment or reply to all the other topics started by others. It’s very democratic, unlike a blog where one person dominates the discussion. With blogs, one single person introduces the topic, and readers can respond; but readers of a blog can never initiate their own topics.

“This is extremely powerful. Like-minded people get together and share. They ask each other questions, like “Who’s going to the big conference in Detroit next week?” Or, “Need advice—how do I prune a lime tree?”

“The collective intelligence shared back and forth is usually quite dynamic and amazing. Some people are very, very helpful. Some are total idiots. But generally, a well-managed and moderated “message board,” as forums are sometimes called, is awesome when there is an active community. And here’s a forum in the financial industry: <http://forums.mint.com/> It’s quite likely that 1 in 25 credit union employees is active in a forum somewhere on some sort of topic.”

Workplace Cultural Changes

When developing policies and guidelines, take into account the changes that social media has brewing in the workplace. Social media moved into the workplace mainstream in 2008 with the growing popularity of Facebook, according to Trey Reeme, director of channel integration, TDECU, \$1.5 billion assets, Lake Jackson, Texas.

“Facebook has become a replacement for e-mail for many employees,” says Reeme. “Twitter is still a fringe; it’s what Facebook was two to three years ago.” What we are seeing on Facebook today are a lot of workplace conversations, he says. “There has been a cultural shift in the workplace, a relaxation of political correctness and more acceptance of divergent lifestyles.”

People can have lives outside of work and talk about them at work, says Reeme. Just two or three years ago, this was not the case. These lives are posted on their Facebook profiles. One of the more significant workplace and social changes is the definition of a “friend.”

“The concept of a ‘friend’ is very different from that of our parents,” says Reeme. “We may meet someone online and become closer friends by sharing information passively and we may not meet this person face-to-face.”

The people we work with become a community and for some folks, their primary or only social group. While adjusting to a new job, social media can assist with getting to know new colleagues, according to Jill Nowacki, VP development, MaPS Credit Union, Salem, Oregon, \$349 million assets. While moving from a position at Credit Union House in

Washington, D.C. in January 2009, to MaPS, she was able to use Facebook to get to know her new co-workers.

“Before I started my new job, I could view the profiles of my fellow employees online on their Facebook pages,” she says. “I also used Twitter to get to know them. It was an opportunity to connect.”

Are Social Media Guidelines or Policies Necessary?

Yes... most credit unions contacted for this white paper lack guidelines or policies for social media, but the same number are in the process of developing them. A few question the need for a set of policies. The latter point to common sense as the guiding light in the social media world. Andy Grove, former CEO of Intel, said that “management is about organized common sense.”

Agreed. In normal times, perhaps, but common sense has experienced impaired capital in the financial services industry during the past few years. Employees and management are grateful for guidelines that clearly show appropriate use and behavior with social media. The following anecdote illustrates.

One day in April 2009 a receptionist at a credit union was frustrated with her job and wrote in her blog about some of the members—comments that were better left unwritten. Usually her blog is read by only a few friends, but in the new world of Twitter and other social media, the link to her blog was sent within minutes to many credit unionists. Twitter, as many readers know, has a loyal credit union readership.

Matt Davis, writing as the Credit Union Warrior wrote about this incident and provides valuable insights while developing guidelines for social media:

<http://creditunionwarrior.blogspot.com/search/label/receptionist>

“Nothing on the Internet is private. I've heard this explained in several ways, but my favorite analogy equates posting something on the Internet to putting up a billboard on a busy stretch of interstate. If you value your job, don't post negative things about your position on your blog.

“Word travels fast. It takes only a few clicks for thousands, even millions, of people to see what you have written. This can be a very good thing...or a very bad thing. Just because your blog doesn't typically have a huge audience, doesn't mean something you write won't end up on millions of computer screens. Fame is often cool; infamy usually isn't.

“Social media rules aren't concrete. They're still being written, and will no doubt be re-written ad nauseam. Some truths, however, remain constant—no matter what the communications vehicle may be: some things are best left unsaid, think before you speak, write, blow smoke signals and never discount an audience's passion for or against your

opinion. While we all have the freedom to write or say anything we wish, we are also free to deal with the associated consequences—positive or negative.”

Access to Social Media

One of the key issues to consider when developing your policies is the question of who gets access to social media. A number of credit unions limit access to the marketing and information technology departments. Other organizations open it up to all departments, while others limit access to break or lunch times. What about posting to a personal blog, when is it allowed?

When the Internet first started appearing in offices, the reaction to it was similar to the reaction to social media today. In many organizations, Internet usage was restricted to management.

Tim McAlpine, CEO of Currency Marketing, gives three reasons why employees should have full access for employees, from his blog: <http://www.currencymarketing.ca/blog/>

1: Employee retention. Many employees, especially the Gen X and Y set, actively participate on social networking sites. In-mail—messaging services within these sites—is replacing e-mail as a primary means of keeping in touch with friends, colleagues and family. This new breed of employee resents being blocked from sites like Facebook and LinkedIn.

This is from [News.com](#): Social networking sites truly do provide robust features that provide a richer means of online communications. Rather than ban employees from using such media, managers should devise ways to turn it to their advantage. Careful thought should be given when considering the use of any networking features that could be detrimental to an enterprise. From there, policies can be crafted on a company-by-company basis to guide employees and gain their buy-in.

2: Connecting with your credit union community.

There are 300 million registered Facebook users. This is a huge group of engaged users. There are more than 1.5 million members of the Vancouver network alone. For a credit union looking to connect with members and potential members, there are definitely opportunities for your credit union and for your employees to have a presence on the social web.

This is from the [Cutter Consortium](#): Jeremy Burton, president and CEO of Serena Software in San Mateo, California, supports bringing social networks to work. Socializing is good for your business, and your employees could help your business via social media to gain customers' trust and to improve research, product design and development, and innovation.

3: Marketing and sales. There is an unwritten rule that social networking is all about connecting and building community. This makes it tough for the number crunchers to calculate ROI, but what if you could sell products and services?

This is from [Evolving Solutions](#): “Whether you're selling widgets, or selling software, or working at a restaurant, Facebook is a great social platform that allows anyone who works for an employer to let all their friends know who they work for and maybe what they're selling.”

Trust is a fourth reason: you are demonstrating trust to your employees by providing access to social media. Conversely, if you restrict access, you communicate mistrust says Rich Jones, VP marketing and business development, Elevations Credit Union, \$920 million in assets, Boulder, Colorado.

“If you don’t allow access to social media, you are sending a message that you don’t trust employees to get the job done,” he says. “Our core value is that we trust our employees.

Elevations, like most modern organizations, has the technology to know when an employee is on Twitter or Facebook, what videos or sites they are watching. “We let our employees know what our technical capabilities are concerning the Web. Employees can access the Web unless it is blocked,” Jones says. “When we hire employees we tell them that we monitor the Web.”

Identifying In-house Expertise via Social Media

One of the benefits of welcoming a vibrant social media into your organization is that it will help to uncover in-house experts. There is a wealth of expertise in every organization that goes untapped, often forever. Blogs and wikis have become mainstream in progressive organizations for “expertise identification.” Policies can help or hinder the uncovering of this expertise.

The internal blog at Vancity helps employees get to know one another at the largest credit union in Canada, but it also serves to allow staff to write about projects they are participating in.

“It forms an online community within the credit union,” says William Azaroff, director of Web engagement & banking, at Vancity, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, CAN\$14.5 billion assets.

“If somebody is working on a project, they can look up an employee who has worked on a similar project and consult the portal and meet with that employee,” he says.

“Social media like blogging, Twitter and Facebook can help us with our major projects to get informal updates,” he says. “People at work and at home are hungry for information that can help them do their job. Social media can help us become more engaged at work.”

Guidelines and Policies: What to Include

The following are suggestions to consider when developing your guidelines or policies on social media.

A set of guidelines is only as good as the number of employees who can understand the written words. Let's face it: some employer literature is hard to read or even worse—boring. There are some organizations that have perfected the art of writing social media guidelines: IBM is one and Verity Credit Union, Seattle, Washington, \$382 million assets is another. Both are short, easy to read, but provide good information and guidance.

One of the best sources for developing your policies is the following database, which provides access to more than 100 sample policies ranging from the Red Cross to Wells Fargo:

<http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php>

IBM developed their social media guidelines with an executive summary of twelve points followed up by discussion:

<http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html>

This makes sense—providing readers with a summary of the main points followed by a further discussion. IBM's Adam Christensen recommends defining "social media" at the beginning in language that everybody can understand and using concise, jargon-free style language and use of hypothetical examples to illustrate specific provisions.ⁱⁱ

Verity Credit Union's Social Online Engagement Guidelines has 11 points for employees to follow. Like IBM's guidelines, they are written in jargon-free language, in short sentences and is easy to understand.

Some organizations have a separate policy for blogging and one for social media, while others have one policy that covers all social media. A third approach is to address social media in pieces of an organization's overall policy.

Whether it's a blog or social media, the policy needs to start with an introduction that explains the purpose of the policy or guideline. The following is from the introduction to Vancity's social media policy.

1. Introduction & Purpose of Social Media

The introduction should state explicitly who the policy is written for, in this case, "All Vancity employees who contribute content that relates to the Vancity Group to a personal blog or a social media site must know and abide by the Vancity Electronic Communications Policy and the Employee Code of Conduct."

The policy should also give an explanation of the purpose of social media—often noted as a “platform for mass collaboration” as Vancity states. Social media is used to build a community of like minded folks for the credit union’s mission.

At Vancity we encourage an open exchange of ideas and views. We recognize that blogs and other social media (Facebook, instant messaging, and wikis), are popular and that you may already have a personal blog or contribute to other social media sites. Social media is a valuable component of shared media and offers a platform for mass collaboration.

The blogging and social media guidelines below are meant to clarify and define your responsibilities as a Vancity Group employee when using social media. Like our Electronic Communications Policy, they are intended to help preserve the Vancity Group’s members, employees and company reputation.

2. Core Values

After the introduction, some credit unions may want to emphasize that their values and mission as organization should be carried over online. The person you represent online is the same person represented face to face. It’s important to be the same person online and off-line. Laws, regulations and behavior still apply. Being online gives one no special rights or privileges, we are still accountable for our actions. Verity Credit Union in its Social Online Engagement Guidelines:

Keep Verity’s Core Values in mind. *The same values and principles that we embrace apply online. When it comes to social media, what you do on your own time is your business. However, posting anything online that affects Verity Credit Union or our reputation falls within the realm of your work performance and will be considered as such.*

3. Accountability

Social media has democratized the workplace by giving everybody a chance to have a voice in the marketplace of ideas and commerce. Ideas and voices that are unique and interesting rise to the top. We are all responsible for what we write. The term “dooced” came about to mean losing one’s job because of what was said on a web site or blog. Unlike a conversation, written words on the Internet tend to stay posted for a long time and are difficult to delete, so writers have to be responsible, accountable and not anonymous.

There is no place for anonymous voices in social media; you have to be accountable for what you say. The bottom line is authenticity and transparency, says Jeffry Pilcher.

“These are the two main themes that give social media any currency,” he says. The transparency component is critical.

“If staff, management, marketing or the agency tries to do anything surreptitious on the social web, it will almost always backfire,” he says. “Even if it doesn’t, the risks outweigh the potential rewards.

If you aren’t comfortable hearing what everyone has to say, stay out of the social web. If you feel compelled to defend yourself, don’t try to pose as someone else.”

The following is from Verity Credit Union’s Social Engagement Online Guidelines,

Identify yourself when discussing Verity or Verity-related matters. You may use your name or you may state your role or simply the fact that you are an employee of the credit union. Make it clear that you are speaking on your own behalf and not on the company’s behalf. For example, say “I” instead of “we,” Don’t misrepresent yourself in conversations. For example, if someone says something critical of the credit union, don’t pretend to be a member.

This is from the William Mills Agency Social Media Participation Guidelines:

Be honest and transparent. Identify your name and status with the agency when blogging or posting about your work. Be the first to point out any personal interests in the subject being discussed. Please use the following disclaimer when your opinion on a topic differs from the agency’s: “The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the positions, strategies or opinions of William Mills Agency.”

4. Inappropriate Use of Social Media

What is inappropriate use of social media and what sites are okay to visit and what sites are taboo? What is acceptable behavior? Remember manners, rules and everything else is still being written. Many of us are still scratching our heads about what to do.

Vancity answers that question in its policy by the following section on inappropriate information in a straightforward manner:

Inappropriate Information: Accessing, downloading and/or uploading inappropriate information, files or software of an offensive nature (e.g., derogatory, political, sexual, racist and other discriminatory material), jokes and screensavers to electronic communication systems is strictly prohibited. Illegal use of the electronic communication tools for any purpose which violates applicable laws including, but not limited to copyright, licensing, personal information protection acts or infringement of any patents or other intellectual property of proprietary interest is strictly prohibited.

Pioneer Credit Union, \$409 million assets, Green Bay, Wisconsin, states the following in its policy about inappropriate behavior:

Employees must be respectful in all communications and blogs related to or referencing the Credit Union, its members, and/or other employees.

*Employees must not use obscenities, profanity, or vulgar language.
Employees must not use blogs or personal websites to disparage the Credit Union, its members, or other employees.*

Employees must not use blogs or personal websites to harass, bully, or intimidate other employees or members. Behaviors that constitute harassment and bullying include, but are not limited to, comments that are derogatory with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color, or disability; sexually suggestive, humiliating, or demeaning comments; and threats to stalk, haze, or physically injure another employee or members.

5. Financial Disclosure

Keep in mind that any time a mention of a financial product in a blog, tweet, or other forms—financial disclosure laws apply online. If you mention a product online, advertising disclosure regulations must be met. Verity Credit Union has a simple reminder in its policy:

Financial disclosure laws also apply online. *If you mention a product online, it triggers all advertising disclosure regulations. You can mention products as long as you link back to Verity’s website page with the proper disclosures*

6. Identification as Employee Online

Employees belong to various social networks and identify themselves as cu employees. If they choose to do so, here is a guideline that Verity CU uses:

Be aware of your association with Verity in online social networks. *If you identify yourself as a Verity employee, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you and Verity wish you to present yourself. This is true about what you write about yourself and the types of photos you publish.*

7. Defense against Personal Attacks

This is one of the key policy statements that employees and visitors to your Web site will need for guidance. Few events could be more punishing to the organization’s morale than personal attacks or heated conversations that should be carried off-line. Young & Free Texas, TDECU, Lake Jackson, Texas, \$1.5 billion assets, Young & Free Blog Policy:

No personal attack comments permitted: *In the interest of fair play, no personal attacks are permitted in this blog’s comments. You may question or argue the content, but not attack the blogger, nor any other commenters. Failure to respect fellow participants on this blog could result in removal and blocked access.*

This from Wells Fargo Community Guidelines which uses an innovative approach featuring employee photos on the top of the page from the company blogs. The rest of the

page is well-designed showing that online policies can be eye pleasing, and need not look like government bulletins:

<http://blog.wellsfargo.com/community-guidelines.html>

***Personal Attacks.** If you disagree with the content, we'd like to hear from you, but ask that you refrain from personal attacks or being disrespectful of others. Malicious intent and or participation not in the spirit of civil conversation will be excluded.*

8. All Rights Reserved & Hold Harmless

You need to state your legal rights as the owner of your blog while saying that those who comment in your blog are responsible for their comments. TDECU, Young & Free Texas, Blog Policy: <http://www.youngfreetexas.com/>

***All rights reserved:** The blog owner, administrator, contributor, editor and/or author reserve the right to edit, delete, move or mark as spam any and all comments. We also have the right to block access to any one or group from commenting or from the entire blog.*

***Hold harmless:** All comments within this blog are the responsibility of the commenter, not the blog owner, administrator, contributor, editor or author. By submitting a comment on our blog, you agree that the comment content is your own, and to hold this site, Young & Free Texas by Common Wealth Credit Union, and all subsidiaries and representatives harmless from any and all repercussions, damages or liability.*

9. Copyrights

The issue of copyrights in the Internet age is a continually changing and confusing one, but one that employees must respect. Here is a straightforward statement from Vancity that is easy to understand:

***Respect copyrights:** You must respect the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material, including the Vancity Group's own copyrights and brands. In quoting someone else's work, be sure to attribute the quote to its author.*

10. Confidentiality

Members trust their credit union to protect their financial assets and information. In the Internet age, information is valuable asset that must be guarded carefully. Here's a statement from Vancity's policy:

***Protect confidential and proprietary information:** You may not post any sensitive, confidential, proprietary, or financial information about the Vancity Group, its members and employees. You must make sure to not use or disclose Vancity Group, its members*

or your co-workers' confidential, proprietary, or otherwise sensitive business or personal information on your personal blog or other social networking sites.

11. Language & Behavior

We want social media to be “family friendly” so that the communication can flow freely. If the conversation takes a step or two downwards towards the mud, the administrator will delete the offending words. People who run on without saying much, or add unnecessary links will likewise be edited or deleted as well. From TDECU, Young & Free Texas:

Language and manners: *This blog is "family friendly" and comments which include offensive or inappropriate language, or considered by the blog owner and administrator to be rude and offensive, will be edited or deleted. Play nice.*

A comment is conversation: *A comment which does not add to the conversation runs off on an inappropriate tangent, or kills the conversation may be edited, moved or deleted.*

12. Spam

One of the annoyances of the computer age is Spam, but we have to live with it and here's a policy from Wells Fargo.

<http://blog.wellsfargo.com/community-guidelines.html>

Spam. Comments focused on selling a product or service, or comments posted for a purpose of driving traffic to a particular Website for personal, political, or monetary gain, will be excluded.

13. Social Media Rapid Response

All organizations should have a designated person or team that deals with the social media issues and responses to issues concerning the credit union. This is an ongoing effort that is covered by Shari Storm, VP marketing Verity Credit Union, in her book *Motherhood is the New MBA, Using Your Parenting Skills to be a Better Boss.*ⁱⁱⁱ

The following provides an ongoing social media response strategy that ensures that your organization is aware of what is being written about it and will be prepared with the facts surrounding any issues:

- *Set your name and your company's name up for Google Alerts. This will send you an e-mail every time your name is published on the Internet. It's free and effective.*

- *Periodically search your name. Type it in Google, Technorati, YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook. Summize.com searches Twitter.*

●*If someone writes something about you on his blog, check his site with a tool like Technorati, and if the blog has a low reference number, you can feel safe that few people know about or read the blog and you let the comment go without response.*

●*Encourage your employees to bring Internet mentions of you or your company to your attention.*

●*Understand and maximize your search-engine optimization. You want to have as much control as possible over your key words. If your site is optimized, it will receive top ranking on search engines. There are plenty of books and consultants willing to help.*

Concluding Thoughts

We are living in a post-privacy world where the Internet is keeping track of what is written in billions of entries. Information is becoming permanent; words written in haste or anger, misspelled or just poorly written, become part of a permanent record. As representatives of organizations, we need to be aware of what is being written and said about us. And if necessary, we need to set the record straight, sometimes in a matter of minutes.

Policies and guidelines are useful because they give answers to recurring questions as well as guidance to a new environment that continues to evolve and is sometimes confusing to employees and management. The laws, regulations and acceptable behavior that govern the financial services industry apply to the social media environment.

Social media experts counsel against having a separate social media strategy, rather they advise making it a subset of an overall business strategy. They emphasize that social media is another set of tools that serve a variety of purposes. A vibrant social media can help build community, engage workers, identify in-house expertise and eventually drive business to your doors.

Developing a set of guidelines for social media requires a delicate balance of ensuring an organizational culture that allows social media to flourish while protecting the credit union's assets, namely its reputation in the community.

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